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QUASAR

WILL QUASAR™ STOP...A MILKY WAY MARATHON?

DIRECT EDITION

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WENDELL VAUGHN . . . THE FIRST EARTH MAN EVER APPOINTED PROTECTOR OF THE UNIVERSE. BONDED TO THE ENERGY-TRANSFORMING QUANTUM-BANDS THAT ARE BOTH WEAPONS AND SYMBOLS OF HIS STATION, HE FIGHTS AN ONGOING BATTLE TO DEFEND ALL LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE FROM COSMIC EVIL! STAN LEE PRESENTS . . .

QUASAR!

ELSEWHERE IN THE MILKY WAY GALAXY, THE FASTEST MAN BORN ON EARTH -- THE ETERNAL MAKKARI -- RUNS THROUGH THE QUASIPHYSICAL REALM HIS TRAINER REFERS TO AS THE TACHYON TUNNEL...

AS MAKKARI'S COSMIC-ENERGIZED LIMBS MOVE WITH A VELOCITY HE HAS ONLY JUST RECENTLY ATTAINED, HE HAS NO CONSCIOUS THOUGHTS. INDEED, HE NOW TRAVELS FASTER THAN THE SPEED OF THOUGHT.

IT'S A PARADOX, HE HAS MUSED, THAT IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE HIS GOAL HE IS REQUIRED TO ABANDON ALL GOALS AND BECOME ONE WITH MOVEMENT ITSELF.

HERE IN THIS HIGHER DIMENSION OF OUR COSMOS, THE SPEED OF LIGHT HOLDS NO SWAY, AND APPROACHING LIGHT SPEED BRINGS NO RELATIVISTIC ACCRUAL OF INFINITE MASS...

BUT WHEN HE IS RELATIVELY AT REST, HIS GOAL IS AS SIMPLE AS IT IS ALL-CONSUMING: TO BE NOT JUST THE FASTEST MAN ON EARTH, BUT THE FASTEST CREATURE IN THE WHOLE GALAXY.

BEFORE LONG, HE WILL HAVE THE CHANCE OF A LIFETIME TO PROVE HIMSELF WORTHY OF HIS AMBITIONS.

DISTANT RUNNING

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SUDDENLY INTO THE BLANKNESS OF HIS CONSCIOUSNESS, A THOUGHT IN AN ALIEN TONGUE RESOUNDS. IT TAKES A QUARTER OF A MILLION MILES FOR IT TO REGISTER AS WHAT IT IS...

MAKKARI...COME TO HUYENNEYUH... IT IS HIS TIME...

EMERGING FROM THE TACHYON TUNNEL, HE EASES INTO THE WORLD OF HIS DEPARTURE, THE PLANET, GROSGUMBEEK...

HUYENNEYUH--OFF HIS FEET!

MAKKARI...QUICKLY...!

MASTER!

I WOULD NOT HAVE INTERRUPTED YOUR TRAINING SESSION, BUT I HAVE BUT MOMENTS LEFT BEFORE THIS FORM WEARS OUT, AND I HAVE SOMETHING I MUST TELL YOU.

YOU ARE MY BEST STUDENT--CAPABLE OF SPEEDS AND DISTANCES FAR GREATER THAN ANY OF MY RACE!

THAT IS HIGH PRAISE, SIR, FOR YOU GROSGUMBEEKIANS ARE REPUTED TO BE AMONG THE SWIFTEST RACES IN THE GALAXY.

YOU MUST DO SOMETHING IN MY MEMORY, MAKKARI.

ANYTHING, SIR.

"YOU MUST PARTICIPATE IN THE GREAT COMPETITION.

"MILLENNIA AGO, A SWIFT ALIEN ARRIVED TO INVITE ONE OF OUR NUMBER TO PARTICIPATE IN A RACE TO DETERMINE THE FASTEST BEING IN THE GALAXY.

"NONE OF US CHOSE TO ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE, BUT THE VISITOR LEFT BEHIND A BOX TO TRANSPORT OUR COMPETITOR TO THE STARTING LINE..."

THIS ALIEN... WAS HE CALLED *THE RUNNER*? I... I *MET* HIM ONCE ON MY HOME-WORLD!*

*WAY BACK IN ISSUE #17. -- ROCK SOLID

MY *SONS* TELL ME THAT WORD HAS BEEN SENT THAT THE FINAL COMPETITORS HAVE AT LAST BEEN CHOSEN AND THE *RACE* IS ABOUT TO BEGIN...

HE IS ONLY EXPECTING US TO SEND A *SPECTATOR*. BUT IF YOU WERE TO QUALIFY AS A *COMPETITOR*...!

I'LL DO WHAT I *CAN*, MENTOR!

REMEMBER, THE SECRET IS IN YOUR *MIND*. YOU MUST SEND YOUR MIND *PAST* ALL LIMITATIONS -- BECOME *SPEED ITSELF*...

I *UNDERSTAND*, SIR.

FAREWELL, MAKKARI... FAREWELL, DUNTUMBLA... FAREWELL, STARTANIOUS... *GODSPEED!*

GODSPEED, *FATHER!*

AS AN ETERNAL, *DEATH* HAS ALWAYS BEEN INCOMPREHENSIBLE TO ME. SUCH A WASTE OF ENERGY.

DUNTUMBLA, STARTANIOUS... YOUR FATHER WAS A *GREAT MAN*. IN THE BRIEF TIME I KNEW HIM, I GOT TO *LOVE* HIM. I WILL FEEL HIS LOSS ACUTELY FOR *ALL TIME*.

I CAN THINK OF NO GREATER *TRIBUTE* THAN TO ENTER THIS COMPETITION HE SPOKE OF...

...AND *WIN IT* FOR HIM!

GODSPEED!

THANK SWIFTNESS, THE OFFWORLDER IS *LEAVING*!

HIS DESIRE FOR SUPERIORITY WAS SO... *UNATTRACTIVE*! IF FATHER HAD NOT EXPERIENCED SENILITY, HE WOULD NEVER HAVE *TOLERATED* SO *UNPLEASANT* AN INDIVIDUAL!

GOOD *RIDDANCE*, *TWOLEG*!

OBLIVIOUS OF HOW HE IS REGARDED, MAKKARI FINDS THE TRANSPORT-BOX AND FEARLESSLY ENTERS...!

STILL ELSEWHERE IN THE MILKY WAY, MAKKARI'S ONE-TIME COMPANION, QUASAR, SITS AT THE EDGE OF THE EARTH'S ATMOSPHERE...

THIS, HOWEVER, IS NOT THE EARTH WHERE MAKKARI AND QUASAR WERE BORN.

THIS IS AN EARTH FROM A DISTANT MULTIVERSE BROUGHT TO THIS COSMOS BY THE POWER OF A COSMIC SCIENTIST WHO WISHED TO STUDY IT.*

*YOU'D KNOW THIS IF YOU'D READ STARBLAST #4 AND QUASAR #57. --REPROACHFUL ROCK

--WHILE MAKKARI APPEARS AT THE STARTING LINE OF THE GALACTIC MARATHON IN ANOTHER SUCH BURST!

WELL, WELL, WELL, WHAT HAVE WE HERE? A FAILED FINALIST COME TO WATCH THE GREAT RACE? HOW SPLENDID!

WHOAAA--!

AROUND THIS WORLD IS AN INVISIBLE BARRIER THAT QUASAR CANNOT BREACH. A BARRIER ERECTED BY THE UNIVERSE'S SUPREME ARBITER OF COSMIC MATTERS IN ORDER TO CONTAIN THE ANOMALOUS ENERGIES PERMEATING THE WORLD.

QUASAR HAS HOVERED HERE MOTIONLESS FOR APPROXIMATELY SEVEN HOURS, PONDERING HOW TO PENETRATE THE BARRIER. HIS GIRLFRIEND IS TRAPPED DOWN THERE.

WAIT A MINUTE! THE LIVING TRIBUNAL PUT UP THE BARRIER! HE'S THE ONE I'VE GOT TO SEE ABOUT GETTING THROUGH IT!

I'VE GOT TO MAKE HIM REALIZE THE MISTAKE HE'S MADE!

QUASAR DISAPPEARS IN A BURST OF ENERGY--

NO, RUNNER, I'VE COME TO COMPETE!

SORRY, SPORT, BUT WHEN YOU LOST THE EARTH RACE TO MY FRIEND FASTFORWARD THERE YOU FORFEITED YOUR SPOT!

YOU'VE *GOT* TO LET ME RACE! YOU'VE *GOT TO!* I'M *FASTER* THAN YOUR OTHER RUNNERS NOW! *I SWEAR IT!*

RUN *WITHOUT* ME, AND-- AND-- YOUR RACE WILL BE *MEANINGLESS!* YOU WON'T REALLY *KNOW* WHO'S THE FASTEST MAN IN THE MILKY WAY!

TELL YOU *WHAT*, OLD SPORT, IF YOU CAN RUN OUR *QUALIFYING TRACK* OVER THERE--

--FASTER THAN OUR *SLOWEST CONTESTANT*, YOU CAN TAKE *HIS PLACE!*

SURE!

I'LL EVEN DO IT ON *ONE LEG!*

INSTANTS LATER...

QUITE *IMPRESSIVE*. YOU INDEED TOPPED AT LEAST *ONE* OF OUR CONTESTANTS' QUALIFYING TIMES. YOU'VE BEEN *PRACTICING*, HAVEN'T YOU?

HOW'S MY *TIME?*

SO AM I IN?!?

FIGILLULLI, I'M AFRAID YOU'VE BEEN *DISQUALIFIED*. MAKKARI, BE PREPARED TO RACE IN *4 QUATS*.

YES!

CONGRATULATIONS!

"FASTFORWARD," HUH?

STILL CAN'T REMEMBER MY *ORIGINAL* NAME. BUT IT'S BETTER THAN *BURIED ALIEN*, ISN'T IT?

YEAH.

SO YOU NEVER FIGURED OUT WHO YOU *ARE* OR WHERE YOU *CAME FROM?*

I GET SHADOWY *IMPRESSIONS* SOMETIMES...OF PEOPLE I'VE KNOWN WHO'VE BEEN *ALTERED* ALMOST BEYOND RECOGNITION.

BASICALLY I'VE PUT IT ALL *BEHIND* ME. I GET JOY OUT OF *RUNNING*. THAT'S *ALL* I NEED TO KNOW RIGHT NOW.

WHAT *YOU* NEED TO KNOW, MAKKARI, IS THAT THESE *WRIST-BANDS* WILL GENERATE YOUR *PATH* OF THE RACE TRACK WE WILL RUN ON TODAY. YOU'LL *SEE* HOW.

WRIST-BANDS, HUH? REMINDS ME OF A *FRIEND* I ONCE HAD...

ANTHROMORPHO!

THE DIMENSION OF MANIFESTATIONS, A STRANGE REALM WHERE BODILESS BEINGS ASSUME FORM...

QUASAR? THIS IS A PLEASANT SURPRISE.

UH, THANKS.

I'M FOLLOW ME!

OKAY.

I NEED TO SEE THE *LIVING TRIBUNAL*. CAN YOU POINT THE *WAY?*

YOU KNOW HOW DIFFICULT IT IS TO FIND *ANYONE* IN THIS NEAR-VOID. I'LL ASSIGN YOU A YOUNG *MANIFESTATION-BODY* AS A GUIDE.

THE STARTING LINE...

THIS IS *IT*. THE MOMENT OF *TRUTH*. MY CHANCE TO BE RECOGNIZED AS THE *FASTEST CREATURE IN THE GALAXY!*

WISH I KNEW WHAT KIND OF *COMPETITION* THE REST OF THESE FOOT JOCKEYS MIGHT BE. I'LL KNOW *SOON ENOUGH*.

GOOD LUCK, MY FELLOWS.

YOU'LL ALL *NEED* IT.

RUNNERS ON YOUR MARKS!

GET SET!

GO!

IN MOMENTS, THE SEVEN RACERS HIT THE OFF-RAMP WITH SPEED SUFFICIENT TO ESCAPE THE PULL OF THE STARTING WORLD'S GRAVITY.

THE COURSE IS MARKED BY BLINKING ENERGY BUOYS POSITIONED APPROXIMATELY EVERY HALF-KILOMETER.

BENEATH THEIR FEET--OR WHEELS--QUASI-SOLID ENERGY DISC'S SIMILAR TO QUASAR'S QUANTUM-FORCE APPEAR, GENERATED AT REGULAR INTERVALS BY THE RUNNER'S WRIST-GADGETS.

THESE GADGETS ALSO PROVIDE THE CONTESTANTS WITH THEIR SPECIFIC ATMOSPHERIC REQUIREMENTS.

CLEARLY THE SPONSORS OF THE GALACTIC MARATHON HAVE FORESEEN ALL OF THE COMPETITORS' NEEDS--

--EXCEPT FOR THIS ONE'S NEED TO CHEAT.

<--AT ALL COSTS!>

?

<A BATON TO A COUPLE OF DOZEN OF MIXIMIXUM'S LEGS ON THE SAME SIDE AND-->

<--HE'LL BE RUNNING IN CIRCLES!>

<ONE DOWN... FIVE TO GO!>

<OKAY, GZOOM-- YOU'RE NEXT!>

<IF I DO NOT WIN, MY PEOPLE WILL MAKE STEW OF ME! I MUST WIN-->

THE GOLDEN RUNNER BELIEVED ME WHEN I TOLD HIM I NEEDED THIS CANISTER TO CARRY MY FOOD SUPPLY!)
(WHAT A MARUNIAN! DOESN'T RECOGNIZE A STUN-DRUM WHEN HE SEES ONE!)

THE DIMENSION OF MANIFESTATIONS...

REAL SPACE...

SO SERENELY *BEAUTIFUL* OUT HERE! I FEEL LIKE I NEVER WANT TO *STOP*!

<CAN'T BELIEVE THE RUNNER WOULD ALLOW A *WHEELIE* TO COMPETE--YOU CALL THAT *RUNNING*?>

<SHE'S ALMOST *IN* RANGE!>

THAT'S PECULIAR...*MAKKARI* AND THE *RUNNER* ARE KEEPING PACE WITH ME, BUT WHAT HAPPENED TO THE *OTHERS*?

SURELY WE HAVEN'T LEFT THE OTHERS IN THE *DUST* SO QUICKLY. THESE ARE THE *GREATEST RUNNERS* IN THE GALAXY!

THING IS, IF I TWIST TO LOOK WAY *BEHIND* ME, I'LL THROW OFF MY *PACE*!

<METAL-LADY, TIME YOU *SPOKE UP*!

KTHUG

Nnnh!!

<MAJOR *KIDDAGE*!>

I'VE MANAGED TO PULL AHEAD A *STEP*. I WILL BE ABLE TO SPARE A *BACKWARD GLANCE* IN A MOMENT!

HE DARES OUTDISTANCE ME AT *THIS* EARLY JUNCTURE?!?

CLOSE MY EYES-- BECOME ONE WITH *SPEED*--FORGET THE OTHERS ARE *HERE*!

NOW IT'S JUST ME AND THE *LONGLEGS*! THE ONE LAGGING BEHIND--*HE'S NEXT*!

YOU'RE ABOUT TO BE *DRUMMED OUT* OF THE RACE, *MAKKARI*!!

NNNH!

THOOG

(WHAT'S HE DOING?

AOOOW!

WELL, I'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO *CATCH UP* NOW. BUT AT LEAST I'VE ENSURED THE REST OF THE RACE WILL BE A *FAIR ONE!*

GOOD LUCK, MAKKARI! SHOW THAT RUNNER WHAT YOU'RE MADE OF!

HEY, WHAT HAPPENED TO *EAST?* HE WAS OUT *AHEAD* OF US WHEN I CLOSED MY EYES AND NOW--?

WONDER IF *RUNNER* KNOWS?

THE DIMENSION OF MANIFESTATIONS...

THERE HE IS! THE LIVING TRIBUNAL MANIFESTATION NEAREST YOUR TIME!

THANKS, LITTLE GUY!

OH, GREAT TRIBUNAL! I AM QUASAR, EON'S APPOINTED PROTECTOR. I WISH TO SPEAK TO YOU IF YOU COULD SPARE ME BUT A MOMENT.

BE BRIEF.

AS YOU ARE DOUBTLESSLY AWARE, *I* WAS THE ONE WHO BROUGHT THE *STARBRAND* FROM ANOTHER *MULTIVERSE* AND ACCIDENTALLY TRANSFERRED IT TO MY *GIRLFRIEND.*

SHE IS NOW ON THAT *EARTHLIKE PLANET* YOU ERECTED A *BARRIER* AROUND.

I FEEL IT IS A *MISTAKE* THAT SHE IS TRAPPED THERE, AND I WOULD LIKE TO SEE HER *FREED.*

THAT IS NOT POSSIBLE. THE STARBRAND IS TOO DANGEROUS TO BE BROUGHT INTO THE GREATER UNIVERSE.

THE WOMAN STILL POSSESSES A FRACTION OF IT. THEREFORE, SHE MUST BE KEPT UNDER QUARANTINE.

BUT, SIR, IT'S NOT *HER* FAULT THAT SHE WAS INFECTED BY IT--IT'S MY *FAULT!*

BLAME IS NOT THE ISSUE--INFECTION IS.

BUT I POSSESSED THE *STARBRAND* MYSELF FOR A WHILE! THERE'S PROBABLY A *SLIVER* OF IT LEFT INSIDE ME, AND YOU'RE NOT FORCING *ME* DOWN THERE!

THE PORTION LEFT IN YOU IS SO MINUTE IT WOULD TAKE A BEING WITH MY PERCEPTIONS TO DETECT IT.

ENTITIES ARE MORE LIKELY TO COVET YOUR QUANTUM-BANDS THAN YOUR STARBRAND-*RESIDUE*. NOT SO WITH HER.

STILL, YOUR GOOD WORKS IN THE UNIVERSE HAVE NOT GONE UNNOTICED. I WILL GRANT YOU THIS BOON: IF YOU WISH TO JOIN YOUR MATE, I WILL LET YOU PASS THROUGH THE BARRIER.

YOU WILL--?! WOW, THAT'S *GREAT!*

ONE: I WILL OPEN THE BARRIER BUT ONCE. IF YOU GO THROUGH IT, YOU SHALL LIVE OUT YOUR LIFE ON THAT WORLD.

THERE ARE TWO CONDITIONS, HOWEVER.

PLEASE MAKE YOUR DECISION.

TWO: YOU MUST FORFEIT YOUR QUANTUM-BANDS TO ME SO AS NOT TO ADVERSELY AFFECT THE BALANCE OF POWER IN THE GREATER UNIVERSE.

REAL SPACE...

MAKKARI IS DOGGING MY HEELS WITH THE FINISH LINE BUT A SHORT *SPRINT* AWAY. HOW CAN THIS *BE*?

IN THE THOUSANDS OF MARATHONS I HAVE RUN, NO ONE HAS *EVER* HUNG IN SO LONG.

I CAN'T SEEM TO CLOSE THE *GAP* BETWEEN US!

I DON'T HAVE IT *IN* ME TO GO ANY FASTER!

I'M NOT *WORTHY* OF MY LIFELONG DREAM!

NO, I MUST PUSH ALL *AMBITION* OUT OF MY MIND... CONCENTRATE ON NOTHING...

... BUT THE SHEER JOY OF *BECOMING* SPEED *ITSELF*!

HIS EYES SHUT, HIS MIND AS EMPTY AS THE INTERGALACTIC VOID, MAKKARI FINDS AN UNTAPPED RESERVE OF POWER DEEP IN THE WELLSPRINGS OF HIS BEING...

HE FEELS HIMSELF BECOME LIGHT IN BOTH SENSES OF THE WORD.

?

HE HAS RUN OUT FROM UNDER THE HEAVY BURDEN OF AMBITION.

AND IN DOING SO HE HAS BECOME LIGHT, WHICH MOVES AT THE TOP POSSIBLE SPEED IN THE UNIVERSE FOR NO OTHER REASON THAN IT CAN!

HE IS NOT EVEN AWARE THAT HE HAS PASSED THE PHOTONIC FINISH LINE UNTIL FIFTY THREE MILLION MILES LATER, WHEN HE FINALLY TAKES NOTE OF THE SIGNAL HIS WRIST GADGET HAS BEEN MAKING.

AFTER A LENGTHY ARC OF DECELERATION, HE ARRIVES ON THE WORLD BELOW THE FINISHING LINE...

〈THE WINNER AND FASTEST BEING IN THE MILKY WAY GALAXY--*

«--MAKKARI OF EARTH!»

I DID IT! I PROVED TO MYSELF AND THE GALAXY WHAT I'M MADE OF! IT WAS LIKE THE MASTER SAID: TO ACCOMPLISH MY LIFE'S AMBITION I HAD TO TRANSCEND IT!

*SIMULTANEOUSLY TRANSLATED INTO A MILLION DIFFERENT LANGUAGES AND BROADCAST TO PLACES YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE. --MILKY WAY MIKE

〈HERE IS YOUR MEDALLION, RUNNING CHAMPION.〉

THANKS.

〈RUNNER, A WORD PLEASE.〉

〈GRANDMASTER!〉

〈YOU ARE AWARE I HAD A SIGNIFICANT BET RIDING ON THE OUTCOME OF THIS RACE.〉

YOU WILL NOW BE THE *GUEST OF HONOR* AT A GALA CELEBRATION.

COOL! I ONLY WISH MY *FRIENDS FROM EARTH* COULD BE HERE FOR THIS!

NOT A PROBLEM. USE OUR *TRANSPORT DEVICE* TO *FETCH* THEM. WE WILL PROGRAM IT TO TAKE YOU TO *EARTH* AND *BACK.*

WOW! ALL RIGHT!

OH, PLEASE, LET *QUASAR* BE HOME!

KIWI

Telephone

SHUCKS, NOBODY IN OUR *APARTMENT.*

MAYBE AT THE *OFFICE!*

THERE'S *KEN TANAKA*, OUR HUMAN BUDDY. I WANT *HIM* TO COME!

HEY, KEN, IT'S ME--*MAX*. LONG TIME *NO SEE*, HUH? WAIT TILL I TELL YOU WHAT I'VE BEEN *UP* TO.

KEN?

HE DOESN'T SEE ME. *WEIRD.*

NO WAIT--HE'S *NOT MOVING!* IT'S LIKE HE'S *FROZEN STIFF!*

AVENGERS MANSION...

SOMETHING STRANGE IS HAPPENING! MAYBE A FELLOW ETERNAL CAN HELP ME GET TO THE BOTTOM OF IT!

HEY, SERSI!

SERSI?

AW, NO--NOT YOU, TOO! SOMETHING MUST BE AFFECTING ALL NEW YORK!

OLYMPIA...

I DON'T WANT TO MISS THE CELEBRATION! I'VE GOT TO GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THIS FAST!

IKARIS AND THENA--MAYBE THEY KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING.

NO! FROZEN, SAME AS ALL THE OTHERS! THE WHOLE BLAMED WORLD HAS COME TO A STANDSTILL--BOTH HUMANS AND ETERNALS!

OR WHAT IF IT ISN'T THE WORLD? WHAT IF IT'S--ME?!?

SOON...

AH, MAKKARI, YOU'RE BACK! I HAVEN'T CONGRATULATED YOU YET.

HEY, YOU'RE MOVING, BUT THIS LADY IS A STATUE. WHAT GIVES?

IT SEEMS YOU HAVE MASTERED THE GROSGUMBEFKIANS' SECRET OF ABSOLUTE SPEED ALL TOO WELL.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

YOU WERE TAUGHT TO BREAK DOWN THE *MENTAL BARRIERS* WHICH LIMITED YOUR *SPEED*, WEREN'T YOU?

YES...?

WELL, OLD BOY, IT SEEMS THE GROSGUMBEEKIANS NEGLECTED TO SHOW YOU HOW TO PUT THEM *BACK UP*.

YOUR *MENTAL PROCESSES* AND *PERCEPTIONS* ARE NOW SET AT *HYPERSPEED*, AND YOU CAN'T SLOW THEM DOWN EVEN IF YOU TRY. ONLY THE *SUPERFAST* LIKE MYSELF CAN EVEN *TALK* TO YOU.

EVERYONE ELSE IS MOVING SO SLOWLY THEY'RE LIKE *STATUES!*

ISN'T THERE A *CURE*?

NOT TO *MY* KNOWLEDGE. THAT'S WHY I NEVER BOTHERED TRAINING WITH THE *GROSGUMBEEKIANS*. THEY'RE SO ENAMORED OF *SPEED*, THEY WANT NOTHING TO DO WITH ANYONE WHO CAN'T *KEEP UP* WITH THEM.

PERHAPS *I* CAN HELP YOU, YOUNG CHAMPION.

I AM THE *GRANDMASTER*. LIKE THE *RUNNER* I AM AN ELDER OF THE UNIVERSE. I AM NOT HYPERFAST, BUT I HAVE CONTROL OVER *TIME* AND *SPACE*.

WHO ARE *YOU*?

YOU CAN *HELP* ME?

YES, IF YOU WILL DO SOMETHING FOR ME IN *RETURN*.

SINCE MY "BROTHER" *FAILED* ME, I NEED A *NEW CHAMPION* TO BET ON IN UPCOMING RACES.

WHAT UPCOMING RACES? I THOUGHT THIS WAS THE *BIG ONE*-- THE *GALACTIC MARATHON!*

THERE ARE *OTHER* GALAXIES, YOUNG MAN, EACH WITH ITS *OWN* MARATHON. THEN THERE IS THE LOCAL *PANGALACTIC RACE*. ALL OF WHICH CULMINATES IN THE RACE FOR CHAMPIONSHIP OF *ALL KNOWN SPACE*.

THAT'S APPROXIMATELY THREE THOUSAND YEARS FROM NOW. BUT AS AN *ETERNAL*, TIME MEANS *NOTHING* TO YOU, NO?

YOU'LL HAVE THE CHANCE TO PROVE YOURSELF THE *FASTEST BEING* IN *ALL CREATION*, AND I'LL CURE YOU OF YOUR *HYPER-PERCEPTIONS* AT THE END OF IT, IF YOU SO WISH.

HAVE WE A *DEAL*?

NO! BEING FASTEST ISN'T WORTH IT IF I'VE GOT TO GIVE UP EVERYTHING ELSE!

CANCEL THE PARTY. I'M OUT OF HERE.

WELL, GRANDY, YOU MAY BE STUCK WITH ME, THE RUNNER-UP!

WE'LL SEE.

THE DIMENSION OF MANIFESTATIONS...

HAVE YOU MADE YOUR DECISION, QUASART

KAYLA AND ME TOGETHER... NORMAL... FOREVER...

ALL I HAVE TO DO IS GIVE UP ALL MY OTHER FRIENDS AND FORSAKE MY ROLE AS PROTECTOR OF THE UNIVERSE.

IS IT WORTH IT?

I DECLINE YOUR OFFER, GREAT ONE.

PLEASE, TELL ME JUST ONE THING! IS SHE GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT DOWN THERE?

THE FUTURE IS NOT MINE TO REVEAL.

THE FINISHING LINE WORLD...

MAKKAR!! THERE YOU ARE! DID YOU WIN?

YEAH, IF YOU CAN CALL IT THAT.

YOU DON'T LOOK ALL THAT HAPPY ABOUT IT.

WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU? WHY'D YOU TAKE SO LONG?

I HAD TO TAKE CARE OF THAT LONG-EARED RUNNER, FOOFERAN. HE SABOTAGED THREE OF THE OTHER COMPETITORS.

HE DID? HMM. THERE'S A REAL DARK SIDE TO COMPETITIVENESS.

I GUESS I SHOULD FEEL LUCKY HE DIDN'T TRY TO--

HE DID, DIDN'T HE?

YOU GAVE UP YOUR CHANCE TO WIN IN ORDER TO HELP ME, DIDN'T YOU? ME--A GUY YOU'VE MET BUT TWICE IN YOUR LIFE!

WINNING WASN'T THAT IMPORTANT TO ME. TO BE WITH OTHERS WHO SHARED MY JOY OF RUNNING WAS WHY I ENTERED.

THE RUNNER TOLD ME HOW YOU'VE BECOME "STUCK" IN YOUR SUPER-FAST MODE, AND NOW YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN.

I KNOW HOW YOU MUST FEEL. I FELT THE SAME WHEN I ARRIVED IN THIS UNIVERSE...TOTALLY CUT OFF FROM MY WIFE, MY FRIENDS, EVERYONE I'D EVER KNOWN OR LOVED.

MAYBE WE CAN *HELP EACH OTHER*... I'LL HELP YOU LOOK FOR A CURE TO YOUR *ACCELERATED PERCEPTIONS*... YOU CAN HELP ME LOOK FOR A WAY BACK TO MY *DISTANT COSMOS*.

IT'S A DEAL! WE SPEEDSTERS OUGHT TO *STICK TOGETHER*. COME ON!

MAKKARI! FASTFORWARD! TERRIFIC NEWS!

THE JUDGES DECIDED THAT SINCE FOOFERAH *CHEATED*, THIS RACE DOESN'T *COUNT*! THEY'RE GOING TO STAGE A *NEW ONE*!

THIS TIME I'LL BEAT YOU *FOR SURE*!

SORRY, GOLDEN BOY, I'VE DECIDED I'M *FAST ENOUGH*. I DON'T HAVE TO SPEND THE REST OF MY LIFE *PROVING* MYSELF. *GOOD LUCK*!

YOU *CAN'T* GO! THEN I'LL NEVER FIND OUT IF I CAN *BEAT* YOU!

YOU CAN'T *DO THIS* TO ME!

OH, YEAH? *WATCH ME*!

BAH! AMATEURS!

REALSPACE, ABOVE THE EARTHLIKE WORLD THE LIVING TRIBUNAL SEALED OFF...

GOODBYE KAZZA I'M SORRY Q

THE END